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**THE VIRGINIA FRONTIER IN HISTORY—1778.**

By David I. Bushnell, Jr.

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**I. THE SOUTHWESTERN AREA**

Following the battle of Point Pleasant, at the mouth of the Great Kanawha on the bank of the Ohio, which brought to a close "Lord Dunmore's War," the frontier settlements enjoyed a period of comparative quiet and freedom from Indian attacks. But this was not to be for long, and it is a strange coincidence that at this same point, three years later, should have occurred an event which was destined to cause the frontiers of Virginia to again be ravaged by the foes from beyond the Ohio.

Cornstalk, chief of the Shawnee then living in the vicinity of the Scioto in Ohio, was the leader of the Indians in the battle of Point Pleasant, October 10, 1774. Within the following month he entered into a treaty of peace with Lord Dunmore and became a friend of the English. In 1777 he, with his son and others of his people, journeyed to Fort Randolph, at Point Pleasant, to acquaint the garrison and settlers with the feeling

of unrest then existing among his followers, and of the possibility of war which would result from his failure to longer restrain his people. A soldier from the garrison, while on the opposite side of the Ohio, was shot by an Indian. To avenge his death members of the garrison murdered the Indians then being held as hostages at Fort Randolph, among these were Cornstalk and his son, friends of the English, who thus perished November 10, 1777.

During the winter months, following the death of Cornstalk, the settlers on the southwestern frontier of Virginia appreciated their great danger, and evidently prepared for the expected attacks of the Indians. The County Lieutenants sent urgent appeals to the Governor, Patrick Henry, explaining the seriousness of their condition and asking aid.

Among the papers of Col. Wm. Preston, preserved in the Virginia State Library, is a rough draught of a letter bearing date of January 16, 1778. It is not signed, but was undoubtedly written by Col. Preston to Gov. Henry. The letter follows:

Sir:

Amidst the Arduous Business in which you are necessarily engaged as Governor and Chief Magistrate of an extensive State, it gives me Pain to trouble Your Excellency with a Letter, or to detain you a Moment from more important affairs to attend to the Situation of this Remote Part of the Commonwealth. But as it is of a public Nature, and to the last Degree Interesting to a great Number of People on the Frontier, I therefore flatter myself I shall stand excused.

The late barbarous, inhuman and impolitic Murder committed at the Point on the Cornstalk and his Party, by a number of rash inconsiderate Villains, I am fully convinced will be followed by the most direful Consequences to this long extended Frontier. As it cannot be supposed that the Shawnee, a warlike, blood thirsty, and revengful Nation of Savages will suffer the Injury done them in the Murder of their Leaders and Beloved Men to pass unrevenged. On the Contrary it is more reasonable to believe that they will, with the Assistance and Advise of our Enemies at Detroit, and about the Lakes, form a general Confederacy with all the

Indian beyond the Ohio, and when the Season admits make one desperate Attack upon all the Frontier Inhabitants from Pittsburg to the lower Settlements of Clinch and the Kentucky, as they did from Colo Cresaps (1) in Maryland to this spot on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1763 by which a great Number of Lives were lost, tho' the Country was but thinly Inhabited at that Time in Comparison with what it is now.

I acknowledge, Sir, that this detestable Murder was committed by backwoods Men who ought to have behaved in a Manner very different; and I am sorry to inform your Excellency that upwards of one hundred Persons in this County alone have yet refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to the State, many of whom are disarmed and the remainder soon will, who cannot claim, nor are they entitled to Protection while they continue Obstinate. These Facts, with the unthinking Part of mankind may operate against the Frontiers in general, But with your Excellency and the Honble Council I am convinced they will have no weight, to whom it will readily Seem that several thousand good Subjects to the State ought not to suffer for the Indescretion and Obstancy of a few, whom Principles & Practice so generally condemned and abhorred.

The Inhabitants in this and the Neighbouring Counties, especially those most exposed to Danger, are in the greatest Consternation. Being generally in low Circumstances, they are not able to remove & support their Families in the interior Parts of the State; and by continuing at their Homes, without the assistance of Government, or the immediate Interposition

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1—This was evidently Thomas Cresap, a native of Yorkshire England, who settled in western Maryland and was a member of the Ohio Company of 1752. He was the father of Col. Michael Cresap, accused of being implicated in the murder of Logan's family on Yellow creek. This really led to "Lord Dunmore's War" which terminated with the battle of Point Pleasant, Oct. 10, 1774.

A letter written by Thomas Cresap to Governor Sharpe of Maryland, dated "Old Town, July 15th 1763" is quoted by Parkman in *Conspiracy of Pontiac*, p. 387, this is in part: "I take this opportunity in the height of confusion to acquaint you with our unhappy and most wretched situation at this time, being in hourly expectation of being massacred by our barbarous and inhuman enemy the Indians, we have been three days successively attacked by them, viz. the 13th, 14th, and this instant. . ."

of Providence They and their helpless Families must fall a sacrifice to savage Fury & Revenge.

Permit me therefore Sir, at the Request of many, and on the Behalf of thousands thus exposed amongst whom is my own Family, to Pettition your Excellency & the Honourable the Council to adopt some speedy measure for the Protection of the Frontier Inhabitants, firmly hoping that the Business of a few, as before observed, will not prevent your Excellency from taking the most effectual Steps in your Power for the Preservation of the whole, or, at least of those who are most exposed to Danger. Should this be omitted or delayed, I am fully convinced, from long Experience, that this Country, or a great part of it will be depopulated before May next, and the Enemy, like Blood-Hounds, will pursue, untill they overtake their Prey; even to the South Side of the blue Ridge, as they did not many years ago.

These Apprehensions are not my own Singly, they are supported by the Opinion of every thinking Person in this Country. For if a Judgment may be formed of the Shawnese future Behavior by what has been experienced of it for twenty four Years past there is not any Reason that I know of to doubt the Event.

As I know myself inequal to the Task, I therefore shall not attempt to form any Plan, or say what Measures should be fallen upon for our Protection. But whatever they may be, whether Offensive or Defensive, I would just mention and with the utmost Deference, that it might be necessary to have a Quantity of Provisions secured immediately while they may be had, which will not be the Case perhaps two months hence. The great and general scarcity of Salt has prevented the People from laying up the quantity of Pork they otherwise would have done, so that I understand Numbers of Hogs in good Order might be purchased along the Frontiers & at this Time Indian Corn might be bought, tho' dear. There is, I fear no wheat in this or any of the neighbouring Counties that can be purchased for the Support of Troops, nor can any article whatever be had without laying

down the money for it. The want of Lead is a most discouraging Circumstance to the Inhabitants in this Time of Danger. They offer any Price but they cannot Purchase it.

I would willingly hope that this general but just Representation of the Situation of the Frontier Inhabitants, & my Pettition on their Behalf, will give your Excellency no cause of Offence, as I am actuated by no other Motive than the Protection of a People with whom I must Stand or fly; and who, in my opinion, are in the most imminent Danger.

I am with Greatest Respect, your Excellency's  
most Obed<sup>t</sup> & very hble Servt."

As already stated the preceding letter is not signed, but there is no doubt of its having been written by Col. William Preston, who, at that time, was Lieutenant of Montgomery County, where he continued to reside until his death in 1783. He was with Washington during several trips into the wilderness, and in 1757 was one of two commissioners who treated with the Shawnee and Delaware, and negotiated with Cornstalk for peace on the frontiers.

In the manuscript volume, the Journal of the Council for 1778, preserved in the Virginia State Library, appears the following note dated "Wednesday, February 4<sup>th</sup> 1778;"

"By advice of Council the Lieutenant Governor wrote in answer to Colonel Prestons Letter on the Subject of Indian affairs, & the Situation of the Frontier, a Copy filed & ordered to be recorded."

Again, "Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1778" the letter was the subject of discussion, and the Journal bears the following record:

"The Board resumed the Consideration of the Letters received from Colonel William Preston & the Board of War, and also the memorial of the Inhabitants of Green Brier on the Subject of the Dangerous Situation of our Western and Northwestern Frontiers, in consequence of the late Murder of the Cornstalk & other Shawnese Indians at Fort Randolph. His Excellency the Governor was pleased to propose the following plan of Defence, viz:

To give Directions for putting all Guns in that part of the Country into good repair,—to furnish one pound of Lead to each Militia Man they being supposed to be possessed of powder sufficient for the present—to direct trusty Scouts to range towards the Enemys Country—to advise proper Stockades for receiving the helpless Inhabitants, wherever the Savages may have it in their power to penetrate—to direct the County Lieutenants of Botetourt (2) and Montgomery to consult together on the expediency of establishing a post near the mouth of Elk River for keeping up the correspondence between Green Brier & Fort Randolph & checking the Incursions of the Enemy, and to do in that matter as they shall judge best to reinforce the Garrison at Fort Randolph with fifty men from the Militia of Botetourt & to give Directions that earnest & close pursuit after the foremost Scalping parties be made in order to discourage others.

His Excellency also observed upon the necessity which in his Opinion there is for endeavouring to conciliate the affections of the Indians & in order thereto of bringing the perpetrators of that Murder to condign punishment, for effecting which he proposed to answer Colonel Prestons Letter by telling him, that if he were not convinced it would be wrong to expose the Inhabitants generally to that resentment which a few only deserved, he should decline taking any measures at all for a Defensive War; but that if the Frontier Inhabitants expected the executions of Government in their favour on any future Occasion they must endeavor to apprehend & deliver up to Justice the persons concerned in that Murder who are all said to be well known & may be easily secured if the generality of the people in those parts are disposed to do it. & that the proof of their abhorrence of an act which not only is most cruel & unjust, but has moreover drawn on their Country other Enemies, when those we already had required the utmost Exertions of America,

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2—A copy of the letter written by the Governor to Col. William Fleming, County Lieutenant of Botetourt, at this time and bearing the date "Williamsburg, Feb. 19, 1778" was printed in *Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778*, Wis. Hist. Soc. 1912, pp. 205-209. This letter embodies the sentiments expressed by the Council and a similar letter was probably sent to Col. Preston.

they must expect to be left to feel that Vengeance which from their Situation they are most exposed to & which in that Case they will so well deserve.

Of all which the Board expressed their approbation & advised the Governor to give Orders to carry the above plans into execution. The Governor accordingly prepared Letters on the foregoing Subjects to Colonels Preston and Fleming, and so far as respects the measures to be taken for the Defence & Security of the Frontiers similar Letters were written to the County Lieutenant (Col Campbell) of Washington."(3)

The following record appears in the Journal under date of "Friday, March 27, 1778:"

"His Excellency having laid before the Board a Letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> Instant from Colonels Preston & Fleming recommending that a post of Communication with Fort Randolph should be fixed at Kelleys, & other steps to be taken for the Security of the Frontiers—they advise his Excellency to write a letter to those Gentlemen desiring them to order fifty men from Botetourt & fifty men from Green Brier to take post at Kelleys—also to order fifty men from Rockbridge to do duty at Fort Randolph. And his Excellency is also advised to issue his Warrant upon the Treasurer for one thousand pounds payable to William Neilly to be conveyed to the said Colonels Preston & Fleming who are desired to put it into the Hands of such Commissary as they may appoint taking Bond & Security to account for this or more money which may be given him to Conduct the business of Commissary to the Militia on actual Duty.—A letter was

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3—Evidently Col. Fleming was offended at the statements contained in the letter from the Governor, and undoubtedly replied. Another letter from Gov. Henry to Fleming, dated Williamsburg, March 14, 1778, contains this paragraph: "I am really concerned at the uneasiness you express from the Manner I mentioned the death of the Indians. I know you too well to harbour the most distant suspicion that you ever approved what is in itself unworthy. Much less any thing glaringly wrong. Believe me I meant not the smallest censure, & I hope you will not think I did." (*Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778*, pp. 225-226.)



according written & a warrant issued." (4) Following this was a list of those known to have been implicated in the murder of Cornstalk and the other Indians at Fort Randolph.

In the entry in the Journal, dated Feb. 4, 1778, quoted above, the Governor was advised "to direct trusty Scouts to range towards the Enemys Country." This was by virtue of "An act providing against Invasions and Insurrections," passed by the General Assembly, May 5, 1777. The act as given by Henning, (Vol. IX, pp. 294-295) follows:

"And the lieutenant, or next commanding officer, of the several counties on the western frontier, with the like permission, shall be empowered to appoint any number of proper persons, not exceeding ten, in any one county, to act as scouts for discovering the approach of the Indians, or any other enemy on the frontier, who, on such discovery, shall immediately give notice thereof to such militia officer of the county, whereon such course shall be pursued as is before directed in case of an invasion or insurrection."

Among the newly discovered papers once belonging to Col. Preston, now preserved in the Virginia State Library, is one relating to scouts serving on the western frontier. Unfortunately the instructions are neither signed nor dated, but the document is addressed to Col. Preston and was probably received by him during the early part of the year 1778. The document is here quoted in full:

"Gentlemen—

To the scouts that goes down new River

You are to proceed immediately to the Pass that leads from Cole River to the Great Glades and after spending some time there you will keep on to where the Indian Path leaves Cole

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4—A letter written by Colonels Preston and Fleming, addressed to Gov. Henry, and dated "Botetourt, March 14, 1778," is copied in **Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778** pp. 223-225. This is in part: "We had an Opportunity this day at General Lewis' of considering the different Matters recommended to us in Your Excellency's Letter of the 19th of Feb'y last, and was assisted with that Gentleman's Opinion. We think it will be necessary that a Post of Communication with F. Randolph be fixed at Kellys abt. 22 Miles above the Mouth of Elk, as a place proper for Checking the Inroads of the Indians as well as inspiring the frontier Settlers with Confidence and affording them protection without which we are afraid the Inhabitants will abandon that Settlement."

River and leads to the Painted Trees on Indian Creek. This Place must be strictly observed. I would have you then go on to the Painted Trees and after spending some time at that considerable Pass, I would then recommend it to you to Travel that part of the Country to all such Places as appear most likely to discover Indians or the signs of them on their approach to the Inhabitants, as I am not acquainted with that Part of the Country I must leave it Intirely to your own Prudence and Judgment to Range in such other Places as you may Judge most for the safety of the Inhabitants & where there is the greatest probability of making Discoveries and should you make any, you are, as much as in your Power, to endeavour to find out their Rout & whether they are Traveling & Hunting in a careless manner or if they are Cautious and watchfull. You must not attempt to Fire on any except in your own Defence. But on making any proper Discovery you are to send off one of your party to me without loss of time with a full account, who is also to give the Inhabitants Notice of the Danger if you really believe there is any, the other two are to stay and carefully watch the motions of the Indians untill they can nearly Judge where they intend to fall on the Inhabitants of which the Scouts are to give immediate notice.

Upon the whole I expect and Depend that you will Perform this very important service with utmost Care, Resolution and Fidelity; and by no means loose any time but keep constantly on Foot, as the Lives and Properties of Numbers depend on your care and prudent attention to the Business as well as the success of any attempts that may be made by the Militia to repell the Enemy should they come in a Hostile manner after you have fully Ranged that part of the Country & proceeded as low as you Judge proper which I suppose will employ you two or three weeks, if you observe no fresh signs or make any Discoveries I would be glad you would either send in one of your Party or Send one of the lowermost Inhabitants to me, if you have opp<sup>t</sup> I would be fond to hear from you.

I need not again mention the Necessity of y<sup>r</sup> Performing the Service in the best Manner as I suppose you have a dire sense of the Importance of it as well as the Safety of y<sup>r</sup> Families who are equally Exposed with others. You are to find y<sup>r</sup> own provisions which I make no doubt the Country will pay you for."

The foregoing instructions are written on one side of a single sheet, on the other side, but in a different hand, are the following notes which were probably made by one of the scouts, to show the points visited and the distances covered. The figures evidently represent the number of miles.

"from Culbersons Bottom to y <sup>e</sup> big Crab Orchard	60
from there to Maiden Spring	15
from thence to Elk Garden	17
to the Glade Hollow	13
	<hr/>
	105

to Cowins fort	10
Moore's fort	5
Black Mores	20
to Mockinson Gap	18
to y <sup>e</sup> Great Eatons (?)	8
to Cap <sup>t</sup> Donelsons line	8
	<hr/>
	174

The route extended through the present counties of Tazewell, Russell, and Scott, between the Clinch on the west and the North Fork of Holston on the east. A manuscript map made by Daniel Smith, now belonging to the Draper collection, was reproduced by the Wisconsin Historical Society, in *Documentary History of Dunmore's War, 1774*. Many of the sites mentioned in the above manuscript are designated on the Smith map. The original was "Done by a Scale of ten miles to the Inch." The reproduction is reduced, but the scale is not indicated, therefore it is not possible to estimate the relative distances.

The conditions on the frontier evidently became more and more dangerous, Col. Preston probably feared an attack by the Indians and for this reason sought additional protection, this is indicated by a resolution of the Council, May 12, 1778:

"The Board being informed of Colonel William Prestons exposed Situation on the Frontiers and that it was apprehended (should he be obliged to remove) most of the back inhabitants would quit their Settlements, They do advise the Governor to empower Colonel Preston to keep a Sargeant & twelve men stationed at his House at Drapers Meadow, to enable him to continue at his Habitation & to encourage others to do so."

The dangers surrounding the frontier settlements of Virginia during the days of the revolution are clearly explained by the preceding documents, and orders of the Council. And not for some years to come were such dangers entirely removed.